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**Turning point in green advertising:  
Do brands become greener  
than their consumers?**

comin**crea**\*

máster oficial  
en comunicación  
e industrias creativas  
universidad de alicante

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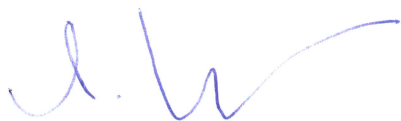
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Anna Kolberg, en Alicante el 5 de septiembre de 2018

## **Resumen**

Since the first special issue on green advertising was published in 1995 by the *Journal of advertising*, the discipline has been defined and grown.

Yet obstacles, like the denunciation of greenwashing or the reluctant consumer, have still not been resolved.

Based on conclusions from the second special issue on green advertising published in 2012, this paper suggests the discipline should merge with CSR in order to tackle said obstacles.

This is not only suggested to benefit the discipline of green advertising, but also to unlock its transformational power in society on environmentally oriented consumption behaviour. The hypothesis is made that consumers do not use their power regarding environmentally friendly consumption, although having started the green movement which gave way to green advertising.

CSR on the other hand shows accountable actions by brands to contribute to society and the environment and might have surpassed the consumer's effort to contribute to environmental issues.

**Palabras claves:** Green Advertising, CSR, Environment, Consumer Behaviour

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## 1. Introduction

The environment and its protection and preservation has become a pressing topic observed in 21<sup>st</sup> century politics, as can be seen in the efforts for a climate protocol to combat the greenhouse effect, or regulations of the European Union to cut the use of plastics and incentivise recycling.

Governments and legislations provide a legal framework, but the main actors in daily transactions and consumption are brands and the corporations behind them, and consumers. Those are the two groups this investigation will contrast and compare.

Supposedly it is the consumers, the society, who support and even started the claim for a more environmentally friendly and sustainable way of life. The process of production, including raw materials, fabrication, shipping, distribution and management facilities of corporations have environmental impacts on much larger scale compared to the individual consumer.

But in the end the effort of corporations and brands to be more sustainable has to be supported by the consumers, in their purchase behaviour and daily consumption patterns. The possible paradox between the mind-set and demand of sustainable businesses and the actual behaviour is the heart of this investigation.

Current literature concerning consumer behaviour and greenness of brands focuses a lot on Greenwashing, but the actual comparison between brands and consumers according to their sustainability, not only in attitude but actual behaviour, has not been researched to this day. This research proposes CSR as an evolution of Green advertising and as accountable-for efforts of corporations to be more sustainable. Consumers on the other hand to not have to be transparent and accountable for their behaviour regarding its influence of the environment.

The relevance is pressing because the power of the consumer might be the most powerful force to combat climate change and pollution, and yet their actions might not follow their mind-set. To investigate this mind-set and green values, in the first part of this investigation literature regarding a green movement and alternative economic models will be reviewed, before moving on to the corporate dimension to define and

distinguish Greenwashing and Green Advertising and finally make arguments for Social Corporate Responsibility as successor of the former.

In the second part of the investigation, secondary data on corporations' environmental impacts will be compared to the environmental impacts of consumers to determine if consumers actually follow through with their demands for more sustainability.

In order to achieve this, data of CSR reports and statistic offices will be analysed and compared according to variables established by revising European Union and United Nations literature.

Almost two decades ago, Gómez, Noya, Paniagua, (1999, p. 17) said that “the solution of the environmental crises is connected to an immediate modification of behaviour in the whole of the population”. Yet, things have not changed for the better, which is terribly concerning.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social dimension

#### 2.1.1. Green movement

##### 2.1.1.1. Classifications of greenness

In order to access the environmental aspect and impact of brands and consumers, an understanding of the development of so-called ‘greenness’ must be established. This will follow the line of prior investigations, especially Olivares-Delgado’s (2002) contribution to Green Advertising in his dissertation ‘*Publicidad y Ecología. La Publicidad Verde en España (1980-1999)*’ (Advertising and Ecology. Green Advertising in Spain 1980-1999) to provide a coherent terminology within the field of investigation. His summary of classifications (see Olivares-Delgado 2000, p. 74) provides a starting-point for the further examination of ‘greenness’, especially taking into account O’Riordan’s (1995) and Martell’s (1994) classifications of political and ethical motivations behind being ‘green’.

But firstly, to clarify the term ‘green movement’, we must first refine the terminology. When describing ‘green’ in academics, ‘ecology’ and ‘environmentalism’ are the terms we come across. They are often used as synonyms but can in fact be distinguished to be even more precise in the argumentation. Ecology, defined by the Oxford Dictionary, is “The branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings.” This definition clearly classifies ecology as a scientific discipline. The definition for ‘environmentalism’, on the other hand, is not as straightforward. The first one listed in the Oxford Dictionary describes it as “Concern about and action aimed at protecting the environment.” Environmentalism as a ‘concern’ would imply awareness and assigning the protection of the environment importance. ‘Action’ is the mobilisation on behalf of those matters. Both terms have a social connotation, not a scientific focus. We can hence conclude that when talking about a ‘green movement’, according to these definitions, we are talking about environmentalism or an environmental movement.

O’Riordan, (1995) identifies different levels of ‘greenness’ within environmental ideologies, suggesting that there is not only one green movement but distinctions can be made according to political beliefs on solutions of individuals. ‘Dry greens’ believe that a solution to environmental concerns can be found in the existing market, maintaining



the status quo. Manipulation of the market, like correctional pricing to favour pro-active management and restorative investments, is seen fit to solve environmental problems. But they mainly believe in self-regulation and that only the regulated should pay (O’Riordan, 1995, pp. 11-12). A more reformist view allocates O’Riordan (1995, pp. 12-13) to what he calls ‘shallow greens’. On the one hand, they want to change the status quo and decentralise the system to incorporate more participation at the community level. On the other hand, they incorporate social values about consumerism and pacifism into their agenda. This might be where Felber’s ‘common good’ (see section 2.1.2.3.) approach could be categorised. Lastly, the most radical and according to O’Riordan (1995, pp. 13) millennial approach is ‘deep greenness’. They believe in anarchic independence and non-hierarchies with strong moral feelings about pacifism, ecofeminism and animal rights. Self-realisation and the environment should not be harmed by the political and market order, hence the anarchic tendency.

Martell (1994, Chap 5) also makes distinctions about actors within environmental movement, but according to their ethics and their reasons to care about environment. Instead of ‘dry’, ‘shallow’ and ‘deep greens’ he uses the terms ‘deep’, ‘sentient’ and ‘shallow ecologists’. According to the definition made at the beginning of the section, ‘environmentalists’ would be more fitting than ecologists, because latter would imply that they are scientifically driven.

‘Shallow ecologists’, being anthropocentric, are motivated to care for the environment only because of the utility for human beings, translating into an intrinsic value of humans and extrinsic for non-humans (Martell, 1994, Chap 5, p. 23). ‘Sentient ecologists’ share the intrinsic value for humans, but extend it to sentient beings, to animals and sometimes plants. The ‘deep ecologist’ care about all environmental entities, not just because it serves humans to maintain their habitat intact, but because of their importance itself (Martell, 1994, Chap 5, pp. 23-24).

In terms of solutions, Martell (1994, Chap 5, pp. 22-23) differentiates 'technocratic' and 'structural environmentalists'. Technocrats believe in environmental friendly technologies, which could be a parallel to O'Riorions 'dry greens', not wanting to change the market structure itself. 'Structural environmentalists', on the other hand, belief only a change of the status quo and a change of the existing structures can bring a solution to environmental problems. This translates into a complete change of lifestyle in order to solve environmental problems, for example by completely changing consumption patterns (Martell 1994, Chap 5, p. 22).

### 2.1.1.2. Rise of the movement

Martell has analysed the sociological and political factors of how social movements arise and applies it to the green movement. From the following table he excludes the environment itself as explanation, for not being a sociological factor, but stresses that environmental concerns themselves are indeed a valid explanation for green movements. The explanatory environmental factors for empowering a green movement could be an escalation of objective problems identified by greens, like global warming or resource depletion, or punctual environmental catastrophes like nuclear disasters or oil spills (Martell, 1994, Chap 4, pp. 19-20, 22).

	Sociological		Political	
	Structural	Cultural	Political	Action
Focus	Structural bases	Cultural change	Political institutions	Movement activity
Explanation	Changing economic structure, new social group/s	Value changes	Access to institutions of interest intermediation	Cohesion, organization, mobilization, leadership of movement
Aims and ideology of movement	Anti-prevailing system, interests of new social group	Cultural changes	Political integration or change in political institutions	Movement as end in itself

*Table 1. Explanations for social movements. Martell (1994) Chap. 4, p. 2.*

According to this table, those environmental concerns would not be reason enough to start a social movement. Even the focus of ‘political action’ as explanation is supposedly not based on environmental. The movement only gains strength through activity, like social and political actors, and the media. Without those factors, the theory argues that an objective or circumstance itself is not enough to start a movement. Moral entrepreneurs like Greenpeace are very effective and influential social actors, also because they are very media effective (Martell, 1994, Chap. 4, pp. 10-14.)

Putting 'political institutions' in the focus of being relevant for starting a social movement, it is more likely that the failure of the institutions has given room for a green movement. When both, the environmental issues in conventional politics, and the interested groups themselves are excluded, it gives rise to a movement. Important for this consideration is that the main interest of the political institutions lies on growth, which holds true for the classically represented groups in politics like the industrial working class, private business and the government. The group of the new middle class, who are not industrial workers and not as dependent on growth to secure their jobs, is not reflected in the political institutions and neither are their ideas. This is a plausible cause for a rising of a movement (Martell, 1994, Chap. 4, pp. 7-10).

This line of argument is closely related to the factor of 'structural changes' being responsible for a green movement. Society has been prospering in the post war period and additional changes in occupational structures can be observed. Said new middle class has risen from the welfare state, and have new occupations in the service sector, public sector and, due to the separation of ownership and control, managerial positions. All the above distinguish them from the industrial middle class (Martell, 1994, Chap. 4, p. 16).

Also, on top of the structural changes there are cultural, value-based changes, which could help to explain the rising of a social movement. In the post war period, society has evolved from class-based towards being more value-based, living standards have risen and the importance of quality of life and non-materialistic values give way for sensitivity for environmental issues (Martell, 1994, Chap. 4, p. 14-15).

Most likely a combination of all those social factors have contributed to the green movement, changing occupational structures and changing values created a new middle class which is not represented in conventional political institutions. Together with social and media effective actors, like Greenpeace, a green movement has formed.

But also the non-social environmental explanation itself must be considered for the rising the green movement. The current *State of the World*, published by the Worldwatch Institute (2017) does give reason to those concerns. Temperatures nowadays are higher than they've ever been within the past eleven thousand years. Due to the vast burning of fossil fuels and in the past a temperature rise of on average 5 degrees occurred over a time span of five thousand years. Now a 2-6 degrees rise is

prognosis for the next century alone. This causes sea levels to rise, changes oceans and rainfall patterns. This leads to droughts, natural disasters and famines. But not only global warming are concerning, also the loss of biodiversity, and expulsion of chemicals into the air, soil and water. At this point, scientists question if civilisation after the next two generation survives (Worldwatch Institute, 2017, p. 5).

The ‘structural environmentalist’ or ‘shallow greens’ do not believe that these problems can be solved within our current system and therefore many environmentalist are calling for a change of the current economy system which they believe will lead to complete resource exploitation and a collapse of society.

### **2.1.2. Alternative economic models**

Corporations and brands are tied to the economy and a change of the current system would affect them dramatically. In the vast majority of the world, including the EU, the current economic system in which they operate is a form of capitalism.

By definition of the Oxford Dictionary of Economics, capitalism is

the economic system based on private property and private enterprise. Under this system all, or major production, of economic activity is undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or organizations, and land and other material means of production are largely privately owned (Black, Hashimzade and Myles, 2009, p. 52).

There are varying degrees of the state regulated private ownership and no pure form of capitalism is found in any state. But the deduction that brands are largely owned by private corporations, whose main focus is profit, holds true for all capitalist economies. This profit does not take into account other factors, like social and environmental ones, a major critic by the environmentalists.

The most prominent and radical alternative economic model to capitalism is communism, opposing private ownership and profit, and which defined by the same authors in the Oxford Dictionary of Economics, is: “A theory of classless society with common ownership of property and wealth and centrally planned production and distribution based on the principle ‘from everyone according to their skills, to everyone according to their needs’”. (Black, Hashimzade and Myles, 2009). The central ideal here is to serve only the people’s needs in equal share without any additional profits being generated for anyone. Only four countries, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Cuba, Laos People’s Democratic Republic, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have declared themselves a state following a form of communist ideology.

Looking into alternatives to capitalism, one question arises: Where would brands fit in? In communism, where the common ownership in reality has resulted to state owned production, there is no free market competition and brands basically have no place, because little to no variations of a same product exist and there is no need to advertise them and create a brand image, brand notoriety and differentiation because of the lack of competing products.

### **2.1.2.1 Degrowth**

This does not mean that there are no alternative economic models or alternative thinking to promote social and environmental aspects, apart from profit and growth, where brands could fit in.

One important advocate for an alternative to the current capitalistic system is French emeritus professor Serge Latouche, articulating his ideas through the ‘décroissance’, in English ‘degrowth’ movement. The ‘degrowth movement’ can be traced back to the report of the Club of Rome on *The Limits of Growth* from 1972. There the idea that unlimited economic growth is impossible for the earth to sustain has been made public and through a computer simulation and calculations they came to the conclusion that, continuing the current trend, within 100 years it would come to a "sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity" (Meadows et al., 1972, p.23). In 2014, Turner of the University of Melbourne compared the then more than 40 year old data and predictions and confirmed the relevance of the Club of Rome prognostics.

Any form of capitalism is focussing on economic growth to generate profits by the owners of capital. The idea of ‘degrowth’ however, according to Latouche (& Macey 2009), is to abandon the goal of exponential growth because the consequences in terms of exploitation of resources would be disastrous to the environment, and consequently us humans who inhabit it (Latouche & Mayec 2009, p. 8). However, ‘degrowth’ does not mean negative growth, which would lead to economic contraction and crises, following unemployment and lowering the quality of life. Latouche and Macey (2009, p. 8) explain that ‘degrowth economy’ can only work in a ‘degrowth society’, and needs another economic framework and logic. The goal of ‘degrowth’ is essentially a better life for the society, working less and consuming less (Latouche & Macey, 2009, p. 9).

He himself considers that maybe ‘a-growth’ or ‘anti-growth’ might be more suitable terms, comparing it to the term ‘ateism’ and suggesting it likewise being a form of abandoning religion, the religion of growth and profit (Latouche & Macey 2009, p. 8). Latouche (2004) underlines that ‘degrowth’ is not a concept and not to be understood as a theory equivalent to growth theories. He stresses that it is a term, a keyword even, to enable thinking and generating ideas about alternatives (Latouche, 2004).

### **2.1.2.2. Circular Economy**

The European Commission, forward EC, (2012) is also calling for a transition of the economy and states this by publishing a 'Manifesto for a Resource-Efficient Europe'. In their understanding of growing pressure of resources and the environment, the economy has to be transformed to be more resource-efficient and even be 'circular'. They are actively appealing to business, labour and civil society leaders to help to transform the European economy into an economy based on resource-efficient lasting growth (EC, 2012, p1.).

Geissdoerfer (et al., 2017, p. 759) defines 'Circular economy' in the Journal of Cleaner Production as "a regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission, and energy leakage are minimised by slowing, closing, and narrowing material and energy loops. This can be achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, and recycling."

This definition takes into account the development of the concept over the past decades, dating back to Boulding (1966) and the more recent and renowned contributions by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. The latter promotes the thinking of 'circular economy' with publications but also collaborates with businesses and policy makers to implement change in economics (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017, p. 759). The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013, p. 14) criticises current economic models as being 'linear', opposed to circular, and following a "take-make-dispose pattern" with significant loss along the production chain, causing stress on resource availability. The 'Circular economy' has the potential to balance the supply and demand of resources, mainly by reusing and recycling rather than disposing end-of-life-products ([Ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](http://Ellenmacarthurfoundation.org), 2013). The model of 'Circular economy' is appreciated by the European Commission (2015, p. 1) as an "essential contribution to the EU's efforts to develop a sustainable, low carbon, resource efficient and competitive economy."



### 2.1.2.3. Economy of the Common Good

Austrian activist and university lecturer Christian Felber has promoted yet another alternative economic model to capitalism and communism, the ‘Economy of the Common Good’. Unlike Latouche’s alternative ‘degrowth’ thinking, it is not just an idea but an elaborated model. According to European Union (2016), short EU, the ‘Economy of the Common Good’ is a very holistic model compared to alternatives, even the ‘Circular economy’.

At the core of this alternative approach is the fundamental idea that profit is only a mean and not the goal of the economy. The actual goal, which should be pursued with the help of profits, is the common good. This idea is actually reflected in numerous democratic constitutions, like in the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (Article 14, 2) saying that “Property entails obligations. Its use shall also serve the public good”. Colombia’s Constitution (Article 333) establishes that “Economic activity and private initiative must not be impeded within the limits of the common good”.

Felber (et al, 2015, Redefinir el éxito económico) argues that the common good cannot be determined by growth or the GDP because economic growth it is not able to measure what really matters: peace, democracy, natural resources, distribution of wealth, health and equality. He suggests that an ‘Economy of the Common Good’ should be based on the core values of human dignity, solidarity and human justice, environmental sustainability and transparency and co-determination.

VALUE	HUMAN DIGNITY	SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	TRANSPARENCY AND CO-DETERMINATION
STAKEHOLDER				
<b>A: SUPPLIERS</b>	<b>A1</b> Human dignity in the supply chain	<b>A2</b> Solidarity and social justice in the supply chain	<b>A3</b> Environmental sustainability in the supply chain	<b>A4</b> Transparency and co-determination in the supply chain
<b>B: OWNERS, EQUITY- AND FINANCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS</b>	<b>B1</b> Ethical position in relation to financial resources	<b>B2</b> Social position in relation to financial resources	<b>B3</b> Use of funds in relation to the environment	<b>B4</b> Ownership and co-determination
<b>C: EMPLOYEES</b>	<b>C1</b> Human dignity in the workplace and working environment	<b>C2</b> Self-determined working arrangements	<b>C3</b> Environmentally friendly behaviour of staff	<b>C4</b> Co-determination and transparency within the organisation
<b>D: CUSTOMERS AND BUSINESS PARTNERS</b>	<b>D1</b> Ethical customer relations	<b>D2</b> Cooperation and solidarity with other companies	<b>D3</b> Impact on the environment of the use and disposal of products and services	<b>D4</b> Customer participation and product transparency
<b>E: SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>E1</b> Purpose of products and services and their effects on society	<b>E2</b> Contribution to the community	<b>E3</b> Reduction of environmental impact	<b>E4</b> Social co-determination and transparency

Figure 1. The Common Good Matrix. Felber et al, 2015, *Requisitos de un balance universal*, para 2.

Those values should then be the basis for an evaluation of enterprises and products. According to a point system, the products would be labelled so that the consumer immediately knows how ethically and sustainably made each products is (Felber et al, 2015, *Consituir un mercado transparente*). Currently ethical products are disadvantaged because the costs of ethical productions are generally higher. Therefore Felber does not only want to label the products for the consumer, but also reward ethical production. For this he suggests a tax break system based on points, ranging from 1000 points to 0. The highest ranking products have the lowest taxes and lowest tariffs. Unethical products would be so expensive to import that they can no longer compete pricewise with ethical products and not only would ethical production be rewarded but unethical actively discouraged (Felber et al, 2015, *Premiar la búsqueda del bien común*).

The evaluation of the EU is hugely positive, also because Article 3(1) (2) (3) of the Treaty of the European Union states that “The economy must serve people”, and money and capital are important “instruments”, not the ultimate goal. This reflects Felber’s core idea of the common good being more important than profit for profit’s sake. In comparison to other alternative models, taking into account the values human dignity, solidarity, ecological sustainability, social justice, transparency and democratic participation, the ‘Economy of the Common Good’ is being evaluated as a very holistic model, in comparison to, among others, the ‘Circular economy’, which only fulfils the sustainability aspect (European Economic and Social Committee, 2016, C 13/28).

This opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee, EESC, (2016) on the ‘Economy of the Common Good’ was adopted with 114 votes to 13 with 11 abstentions. It is conceived to be within the legal framework of the EU and to help establish a more ethical economy based on European values. The model could help the transition to a European ethical market and “foster social innovation, will boost the employment rate and will benefit the environment” (EESC 2016, C 13/26).

The Committee agrees on social development being beyond the GDP and even see the opportunity of promoting ethical external trade as ‘Brand Europe’ (EESC 2016, C 13/31). The evaluation even goes so far as to see the possibility of the Economy of the Common good as a renewed CSR strategy for the European Union, by rewarding enterprises with higher ethical performance (EESC, 2016, C 13/27).

Felber's alternative economic model is responding to the desires of a huge part of society, not only environmentalist. According to information provided by a poll in 2014, the Trade Union Confederation found out that there is not a single country in the world where people believe the economic system is fair (p. 21). Other opinion polls, like one by Germany-based Corporation Bertelsmann (2010), one of the largest mass media companies worldwide, also support those findings. The results of the poll were that a stunning 88% Germans and 90% Austrians want a 'new economic order' (Bertelsmann 2010, p. 1). We now turn our focus on the driving force of the current economic system the private owners of capital, corporations.

## **2.2. Corporate dimension**

### **2.1.1. Greenwashing**

Introducing the ‘green’ dimension to brands and corporations is a huge credibility issue and might even be a paradox in itself, because of the concepts of profit and growth being somewhat contractionary to environmental preservation, as discussed in the previous section.

When we are talking about greenwashing, according to the Oxford dictionary, it is “Disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image.” The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, UNRISD, (2003, p. 109) describes greenwashing as “embellished or inaccurate information disseminated by a company or business association so as to present an environmentally responsible public image.”

Those definitions suggest the disinformation takes place knowingly and deliberately to deceive the consumer, washing their image and present it as environmentally responsible, opposed to the origins of the concept ‘Green advertising’ (discussed in the next section).

Mander (1972) in his article ‘Ecopornography: One Year and Nearly a Billion Dollars Later, Advertising Owns Ecology’ early on criticises corporations for spending on advertising a green image instead of spending the money on measures directly benefiting the environment. This describes the paradox quite accurately.

Shell for example decided to make huge spending on public relations regarding their environmentally friendly image, but without answering to NGOs and not letting independent externals track their work. This enraged activist who in London literally greenwashed the doors of the Shell international branch with green and red colour (Klein, 2009). Activists have launched other creative ways to expose Greenwash, like posting examples online (see [www.greenwashingindex.com](http://www.greenwashingindex.com)) or categorizing it into different types of ‘corporate sins’ (Bowen and Aragon-Correa, 2014).

Greenpeace (1992) published their *Book on Greenwash* to accuse 9 multinationals not only of greenwashing, but by posing as “friends of the environment” (p. 1) abusing their power to even manipulate international climate conferences and shape the agreements and programs to their favour. All these negative examples and connotations are a huge obstacle for green advertising.

### 2.1.2. Green advertising

For the development of establishing green advertising as a coherent discipline, the *Journal of Advertising* was of crucial importance, by dedicating a whole Special issue to green advertising in 1995. There are different dimensions to green advertising, and therefore its definitions can vary in terms of the true intention of its usage. In said special issue, Zinkhan and Carson (1995) defined green advertising as “promotional messages that may appeal to the needs and desires of environmentally concerned consumers” (p.1). Here the focus lies on a specific target group. Schuhwerk and Lekoff-Hagius (1995) defined it as message that features an environmental attribute for a product or service (p. 45), so classic product advertising. Kilbourne (1995), on the other hand, defined it as a message “promoting environmentally oriented consumption behaviour” (p. 17). The last definition is very distinguishable because here green advertising is meant to serve the greater good of a positive change in society.

Kilbourne’s (1995) article is one of the most notable contributions to the Special issue on green advertising, because of his efforts to develop a theoretical framework for green advertising by accessing attitudes, behaviours and the numerous terms linked to ‘green’ (see section 2.1.1.1.) for future scholars and researchers. This framework has indeed been picked up, for example by Olivares-Delgado (2002), to analyse green advertising in Spain. Olivares-Delgado (2002) also discusses the dilemma Kilbourne (1995) describes in his article called ‘Green Advertising: Salvation or Oxymoron?’. The contradiction of advertising on the one hand, which promotes consumption and growth, and environmental concerns on the other, which are largely negatively influenced by growth, is one of the mayor credibility issues the discipline has. This is why the term Greenwashing was discussed in the previous section.

Seeing green advertising in the light of Latouche’s ideas of ‘degrowth’ (see section 2.1.2.1), it would indeed not contribute to any improvement of the environmental state. But other ‘structural environmentalist’ approaches, which suggest a change of the current paradigm, could embrace green advertising as benign. In Felber’s ‘Economy of the Common Good’ (see section 2.1.2.3.), where more ethically and environmentally friendly products would be labelled, green advertising has a justification but might become even a little superfluous. Nevertheless Bickard’s and Seals’ (2012) article on

eco-seals suggest that government labels might be less effective on informed consumers, which could be an interesting weakness of Felber's framework.

In a transition towards a 'Circular economy'(see section 2.1.2.3), a more technocrat environmentalist approach perhaps, and promoted by the EU, green advertising could be a powerful tool supporting the pioneer corporations and brands who are becoming more circular in their production.

Another contribution to the 1995 green advertising issue of the *Journal of advertising*, focuses on how to convey the message effectively. Obermiller (1995) is assessing how different approaches of communicating environmental concerns influence the audiences. He uses the 'the baby is sick/the baby is well' model, which means the 'sick' translate to increasing the concern about an issue and the 'well' means that something can be done and the individual is important (Obermiller, 1995). He concludes that the relative salience, the importance assigned by individual consumers, is critical for how to convey the message. For an already recognised problem the 'well' approach is more effective, serving as a call to action, and for an unknown issue the 'sick' approach raises better awareness.

The other articles in the 1995 issues are centred on the green consumer. Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius (1995) found out that better informed consumers were less influenced by Green advertising and see this as a chance to attract uninvolved consumers with green claims, but also as a danger of losing the high involved. This is supported by Shrum's and McMarty's (1995) article which characterises the green consumer as opinion leader and careful shopper who actively seeks information. He also does seek information from advertising but is likewise very sceptical about it. Marketers have to be careful to avoid ambiguous and misleading messages. In the same line, Zinkhan and Carlos (1995) go even a step further and talk about the 'reluctant consumer'. They accessed that green consumers have negative attitudes about the business and the advertising industry, which would mean that they are more radical, and following Martell's (1994) terminology, 'structural environmentalist' who do not think the current paradigm fit to solve environmental issues.

In 2012, a second special issue on green advertising was published by the *Journal of Advertising*. Obermiller's (1995) line of researching how the message is best conveyed was picked up by Kareklas, Carson and Muehling (2012). They use the terms

‘promotion’ instead of ‘well baby’ and ‘prevention’ instead of ‘sick’, but the meanings are rather similar. Promotion messages highlight the pursuit of positive outcomes and prevention messages focus on avoiding negative outcomes. The focus this time was not on the relative salience, but whether an individual is me-orientated, so having an independent self-view, or is us-orientated, which is an interdependent self-view. The outcomes are that me-orientated individuals respond better to promotional messages in green advertising and us-orientated apparently are better responding to concerning, prevention messages.

Regarding scepticism and the reluctant consumer, which Zinkhan and Carlos (1995) first touched on, Xie and Kronrod (2012) added that numeric details in green advertising only helps with less sceptical audiences, hence it is not a way to persuade the sceptical consumers. Do Paço’s and Reis’ findings (2012) confirmed that the more environmentally concerned an individual is, the more sceptical he is towards green advertising. They suggest that corporations should seek the opportunity to educate, together with NGOs, consumers to distinguish between real and false environmental claims, hence greenwashing.

Fowler and Close (2012) make an important advancement regarding the messages of green advertising and claim the agendas of corporations and consumers do not align. Corporations focus on the macro level, saving the world, and consumers do not believe that neither corporations nor they can do that. Instead, consumers want to contribute on the micro level, making small but specific and meaningful changes. Here, corporations should listen and change their discourse in order to connect with the consumer and work together.

In the first issue, Zinkhan and Carlos (1995) contribute an interesting outlook about advertising in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which unluckily we can refute today. They had the vision that in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, pollution could be banned and society could establish a sustainable, zero-emissions means of existence. This fits with the emerging of the ‘Circular economy’ model (see section 2.1.2.3) but it still has not been implemented to the day. They also stated that people and businesses would change their behaviour and a high standard of living will be achieved with preserving the resources for future generations.



Like Kilbourne does (1995), Zinkan and Carlos (1995) see advertisers in an important role because they have the resources and skills to shape public opinion, which Martell's (1994) 'movement activity' dimension for green movements strongly supports (see section 2.1.1.1). But looking at the situation today, obviously something has failed. It could be argued that 'technocratic' or 'dry green' approaches do not work and that structures need to be changed.

The conclusions from the 2012 issue however also provide a promising course of action without changing the current economic paradigm. Green advertising needs to evolve beyond advertising and corporations must actively contribute to sustainability, like helping to educate the public (Do Paço and Reis, 2012) and stop the discourse of saving the world and settle for helping the consumers making contributions in their day to day life (Fowler and Close, 2012). This would go hand in hand with Social Corporate Responsibility, introduced in the next section.

### **2.1.3. Social Corporate Responsibility**

There is no universally accepted definition of Corporate Social Responsibility, forward CSR, in the literature (O'Riordan & Fairbrass, 2008) which surely can be attributed to the interdisciplinary character on the concept.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development defines is as “commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large.” (Holme and Watts, 2000, p. 8).

CSR has a so-called triple-bottom-line and should address economic, social and environmental concerns (McKenzie, 2004, p. 4). Carroll (1999) has made an important contribution tracing the development and origins of CSR. She considers Bowen (1953) the father of modern CSR. His belief was that the largest businesses were vital centres of power and decision making and that the actions of these firms touched the lives of citizens at many points.

In the 60s, in an attempt to formalise, Davis (1960) set forth his definition of CSR in an article by arguing that it refers to “businessmen’s decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm’s direct economic or technical interest” (Davis, 1960, p. 70). This is significant because CSR is set in the management area and it stresses that CSR is not only about complying to existing laws but make the effort to go beyond that.

In the 70s a landmark contribution to the concept of CSR came from the Committee for Economic Development (CED) and they explicitly mention “environmental conservation” for the first time in CSR. Harold Johnson’s (1971) definition is important because interest groups are now introduced to CSR: “A socially responsible firm is one whose managerial staff balances a multiplicity of interests. Instead of striving only for larger profits for its stockholders, a responsible enterprise also takes into account employees, suppliers, dealers, local communities, and the nation” (p. 50).

So we can conclude that CSR encompasses a contribution beyond the company’s economic interest to the well-being of environment and society, taking into account their interest groups.

Coming back to the multidisciplinary character of CSR, it originated in the Management area and now is also a concept incorporated into Accounting and Marketing (Mangion, 2006).

Apart from the benefit for current and future generations through CSR in terms of environmental and social contributions, Monsen (1974) and Shrivastava (1995) confirm direct benefits to business, among other things: positive brand awareness and strategic competitive advantage.

This suggests that CSR should be managed by the Marketing department and be part of Communication. Argenti, Howell, and Beck (2005) define strategic communication as “aligned with the company’s overall strategy, to enhance its strategic positioning” (p. 83). CSR is indeed interdisciplinary, as it should be as an integrated part of the company, but Marketing and the Communication strategy should derive directly from the corporate strategy and implement it. The intangibles like brand awareness, brand image and reputation are managed by the Communication division. Additionally, the CSR activity needs to be strategically organised for and communicated to the interest groups, in line with the overall corporate strategy. The responsibility to design specific CSR activities should consequently be part of the Communication division.

Porter and Kramer (2006) make contributions to CSR strategy and the essential guide for choosing an issue to focus on is that should be a meaningful benefit for society that is also valuable to the business. Generic social issues are in the long run not as effective as issues affected by the company’s activities. According to them (2006), “CSR unlocks shared value by investing in social aspects of context that strengthens company competitiveness” p.10

CSR is not philanthropic because the strategic dimension and goals are clearly defined, but that must not diminish its possible positive impact. Cutting emission might result in huge energy cost savings, as can recycling and reducing raw materials, and the brand image and reputation is an important intangible value for brands. Even preserving the environment only for the sake of being able to continue operating in the future is strictly seeing profit orientated. But if CSR is transparent, this way it might be even more authentic and comprehensible for consumers, and help diminish scepticism and mistrust.

## 2.2. Conceptual conclusion

We have established that Green advertising as a tool to promote environmentally oriented consumption behaviour has not had the expected effect. The most involved consumers with the environment have turned out to be the most sceptical ones towards green advertising, and that corporations are regularly accused of greenwashing when applying a green communication strategy.

Advertising is part of the Communication division of the Marketing department, like CSR should be. This should be seen as a change for businesses and brands to establish a greener and more ethical brand image in the long run which is backed by accountable actions. This way the companies' efforts cannot be rejected as easily and it could be a chance bridge the gap between corporations and the environmentally involved consumers as they are the same time the most sceptical consumers. Currently this distrust means that the ones who should be the most powerful allies of brands and corporations and who want to be more sustainable are not believing and hence not supporting them.

Therefore it would be crucial for the brands to be coherent in their claims and their actions and be as transparent as possible. Companies who opt for greenwashing tactics and not adhere to their claims are damaging the chance to reinvent green advertising in CSR.

Kilbourne (1995) and Zinkan and Carlos (1995) helped define the discipline of Green advertising the first Special issue on green advertising of the *Journal of Advertising* in 1995. They believed in the powers of advertisers to promote environmentally oriented consumption, which can affirmed by Martell's (1994) explanation of a green movement through action activity and media.

Now in the second special issues, researchers have followed their footsteps and suggest for future Green advertising that companies must actively contribute to sustainability. This could be helping to educate the public (Do Paço and Reis, 2012) and helping the consumers making contributions for sustainability in their day to day life instead of claiming to save the world (Fowler and Close, 2012). These measures are excellent examples of CSR activities.

CSR goes beyond the economic activities and companies must care for their stakeholders and interest groups, and the idea of giving back to society. Even when profits instead of the common good might still be the driving factor, it is the actions that count. CSR could be categorised as corporations acting like ‘Dry greens’ (O’Riordan) or ‘technocratic environmentalists’ (Martell, 1994), less ambitious and revolutionary perhaps than other environmentalists. But the crucial points is that CSR is feasible, and realistically implementable immediately without changing the current structures, independently from government and legislations.

It might now be up to the consumers to make changes towards more sustainable consumption behaviour in their daily life, like Gómez, Noya and Paniagua (1999, p. 17) said almost two decades ago, “the solution of the environmental crises is connected to an immediate modification of behaviour in the whole of the population”. Therefore the research objective of this investigation is to contrast the actual behaviour of companies practicing CSR with the consumers.

### 3. Research objectives and hypothesis

CSR has been suggested as a new form of green advertising, embedded deeply in the company culture and allowing less scepticism of greenwashing which endangers consumer's commitment and support.

The overall aim of this research now is to contrast the development of brands' and consumers' behaviour regarding their impact on the environment.

In order to achieve this goal, the following research objectives have been identified:

RO1: Elaboration of a method to compare both actors.

RO2: Development of environmental impacts of brands employing CSR.

RO3: Development of environmental impacts of consumers.

The expected outcomes of the research, after the review and discussion of literature relevant to the topic, are formulated in the following main hypothesis:

H1: Brands employing CSR have surpassed the consumer in their efforts to be sustainable.

H2: The mind-set of the consumer varies drastically from their actual behaviour.

H3: CSR is a powerful tool for a more sustainable economy.

#### 4. Methodology

The methodology of this investigation is an analytical research of quantitative secondary data. If analytical research is not practicable due to the recentness of the topic, exploratory research shall be conducted instead. Company data is retrieved through official CSR reports and consumer data is retrieved from national and international statistic offices. A set of variables, based on European Union and United Nations criteria, is established to allow a comparison between the environmental impact of brands and consumers.

##### **Research Objective 1: Elaboration of a method to compare brands' and consumers' environmental impacts.**

In order to retrieve relevant data concerning the development of the environmental impact of each interest group, the variables for the comparison must be established first.

There is no official set of variables regarding environmental impacts, and many manuals on sustainability do not formulate precise criteria, so a brief comparative analysis of the criteria found in the following publications has been made:

- The regulations of the EU Community eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS) (2017)
- The European Commission's Guidelines on non-financial reporting (2017)
- The United Nations Environmental Program's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 (2015)
- United Nations Conference on Environment & Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992
- The Green Globe's Standard Criteria and Indicators (2018)

The different criteria for sustainability of each of these manuals have been listed, normalised and counted in terms of their frequency. As can be seen in the following Table 2, the variables with the highest concordance are:

1. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions / climate change
2. Water pollution (fresh and ocean)
3. Hazardous wastes / pollution
4. Recycling / resource efficiency
5. Use and contamination of land

6. Use of resources: water
7. Biodiversity / use of resources: flora and fauna
8. Use of renewable energy



	CO2 emissions / climate change	water pollution (fresh and ocean)	hazardous wastes / pollution	recycling / resource efficiency	use and contamination of land	use of resources: water	biodiversity / use of resources: flora and fauna	use of resources: raw material	use of renewable energy	environmental impacts from disposal	deforestation	sound use of biotechnology	radioactive wastes	solid wasted / sewage-related issues	interactions with wildlife
EU Community eco-management and audit scheme	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1							
European Commission: Guidelines on non-financial reporting	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1					
United Nations Environment Programme Sustainable Development Goals 2030	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1						
UN Rio 1992	1	1	1		1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1	
Green Globe Standard Criteria and Indicators	1	1	1	1		1	1		1						1
Score	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	3	4	1	1	1	1	1	1

Table 2. Variables of Sustainability. Own elaboration.

Evaluating these variables in terms of applicability to both brands and consumers, not all of them are feasible, given the nature that the criteria have been mainly elaborated for businesses.

	Can be measured for both brands and consumers.	Does generally not apply to the individual consumer.
1. CO2 emissions	x	
2. Water pollution (fresh and ocean)		x
3. Hazardous wastes / pollution		x
4. Recycling	x	
5. Use and contamination of land		x
6. Use of resources: water	x	
7. Biodiversity / use of resources: flora and fauna		x
8. Use of renewable energy	x	

*Table 3. Feasibility of variables measuring environmental impact. Own elaboration.*

The final shortlist for variables shall therefore be:

1. CO2 emissions
2. Recycling / waste
3. Use of resources: water
4. Use of renewable energy / carbon offsets.

## 4.1 Analytical research

### Research Goal 2: Development of environmental impacts of brands through CSR.

To research the development over time of brands using CSR, official company reports have been retrieved.

In order to explore the potential of positive environmental impacts of CSR, pioneers in this field have been selected, according to a shortlist by the Reputation Institute in Boston.

1. LEGO Group
2. Microsoft
3. Google
4. The Walt Disney Company
5. BMW Group
6. Intel
7. Robert Bosch
8. Cisco Systems
9. Rolls-Royce Aerospace
10. Colgate-Palmolive
11. Barilla

This list was elaborated through the Reputation Institute's "RepTrak® Model" (2017):

Global CSR RepTrak® is a study that Reputation Institute conducts annually to measure the reputation of the world's most socially responsible, highly-regarded and familiar global companies in 15 countries. Included firms must meet the following qualifications:

- 1) Have a significant economic presence in the 15 largest economies
- 2) Have an above average reputation in its home country
- 3) Have global familiarity over 40%

It is the largest Global reputation study, with ~170,000 ratings collected in Q1 2017.

Respondent Screening:

- Familiarity: Respondents must be "somewhat" or "very" familiar

The results tell us:

- Which companies are most highly regarded for CSR among the informed general public

Study components include:

- CSR RepTrak® Pulse
- Dimensions of Reputation and Drivers of Reputation
- Business Impact of CSR
- Touchpoint Analysis

The timespan for the analysis is dependent on availability. Therefore, all available CSR reports, which formerly also have been called Sustainability or Citizenship reports, have been retrieved. Beginning of the collection is 2006, which is the first year first ranked company LEGO Groups published its first CSR report.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
LEGO Group												
Microsoft												
Google												
The Walt Disney Company												
BMW Group												
Intel												
Robert Bosch												
Cisco Systems												
Rolls-Royce Aerospace												
Colgate-Palmolive												
Barilla												

Table 4. Availability of CSR reports by year. Own elaboration.

The table displays the availability of CSR reports by company and by year. Grey indicates the unavailability, whereas green show the greatest overlapping of availability of reports. Therefore, Google and Barilla would have to be excluded for an analytical data analysis over a period of time, and the analysis would start from 2012 onwards.

For his purpose, the 2012 – 2017 CSR reports of the following companies

1. LEGO Group
2. Microsoft
3. The Walt Disney Company
4. BMW Group
5. Intel
6. Robert Bosch
7. Cisco Systems
8. Rolls-Royce Aerospace

## 9. Colgate-Palmolive

have been analysed in accordance to the previously established variables:

1. CO2 emissions
2. Recycling / waste
3. Use of resources: water
4. Use of renewable energy

Revising the data provided in the CSR reports, and other complementary reports, it was ultimately not sufficiently normalised to establish coherent data lines for even one company.

Microsoft, for example, provides the total number of CO2 emissions, but only tracing back until 2013. For older data, the Scope 3 emissions, which are indirect emissions, only include ‘air travel’ (Figure 2). In newer reports, Scope 3 emissions consist of 7 additional emission types, as can be seen in Figure 3.

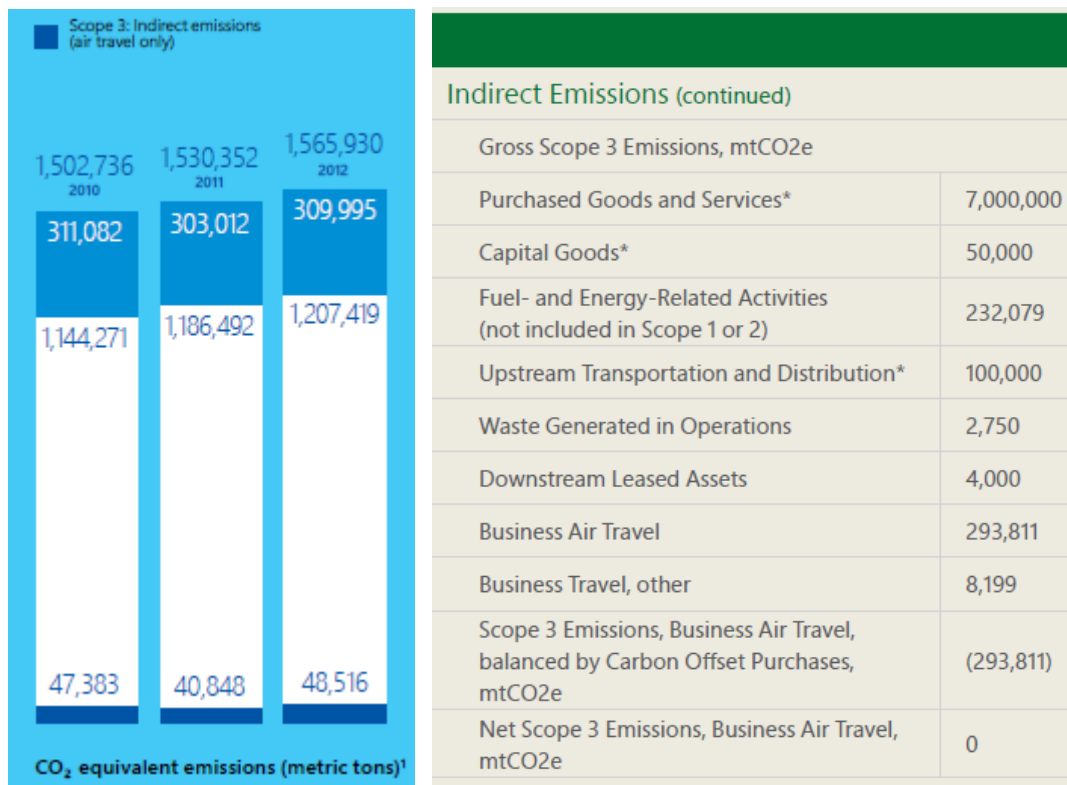


Figure 2. Microsoft CSR report 2014 on emissions, p. 52. (left)

Figure 3. Microsoft CSR report 2013 on emissions, p. 62. (right)



## 4.2. Preliminary results

The inconsistency of data, also found in other data sets provided by for example the ranking leader LEGO group, prevents the elaboration of valid data lines for the period of 2012-2017 within one same company. Therefore no analytical research of the evolution of CO2 emissions, recycling, water usage and renewable energy shares from 2012-2017 of the 11 leaders in CSR in 2017 can be conducted. Research Goal 2 has consequently not been reached.

Although firstly unsatisfactory, this result is also a very relevant one.

If CSR, as its current form, has the strategic goal to improve the brand's image and reputation, the reporting, although voluntarily, must be transparent and cohesive. If it is not, the effort could be fruitless or even have negative outcomes, like devaluating the brand's image and reputation. When data is incomplete and not transparent, the suspicion of doing greenwashing instead of true CSR could easily be raised within consumers, especially the reluctant ones.

The *Sustainability Reporting Guidelines* by the Global Reporting Initiative should be followed and even more rigorous data presentation standards should be globally established.

If not, CSR as communication tool will not be authentic and therefore not be successful in the long-run, and it also will not be an alternative way to achieve Kilbourne's (1995) vision for green advertising: promoting environmentally oriented consumption behaviour.

### **4.3. Exploratory research**

#### **RO3: Development of environmental impacts of consumers.**

Based on the strong concern on environmental issues by the European Union and their goal of a transformation towards a more sustainable economy (see section 2.1.2), the behaviour of consumers living in the EU is chosen in order to access the development of their environmental impacts. This is no complete representations of consumers worldwide, but serves as comparison basis for this exploratory research. In worldwide data different economic development and living standards have an effect on the ability to diminish ones environmental impact. In the EU, the living standard and structures are generally given to reduce ones environmental impact.

Therefore official data of the EU citizens retrieved from statistical offices, primarily Eurostat, is consulted. The exact analytical comparison with the development of brands' impacts over time is not possible, therefore the also data from varying timespans can be consulted to best describe the overall trend.

Each of the identified variables, CO2 emissions, recycling and waste, use of water and use of renewable energy, will now be analysed. The trend of the consumers' impact on environment will compared be compared to the same variable found in the CSR reports of the leading brands in 2017. The goal of exploratory research is no precise analytical information, but to investigate a relatively unexplored field to get a better understanding of the relevant variables and identify topics for further research.



### 4.3.1. CO2 emissions

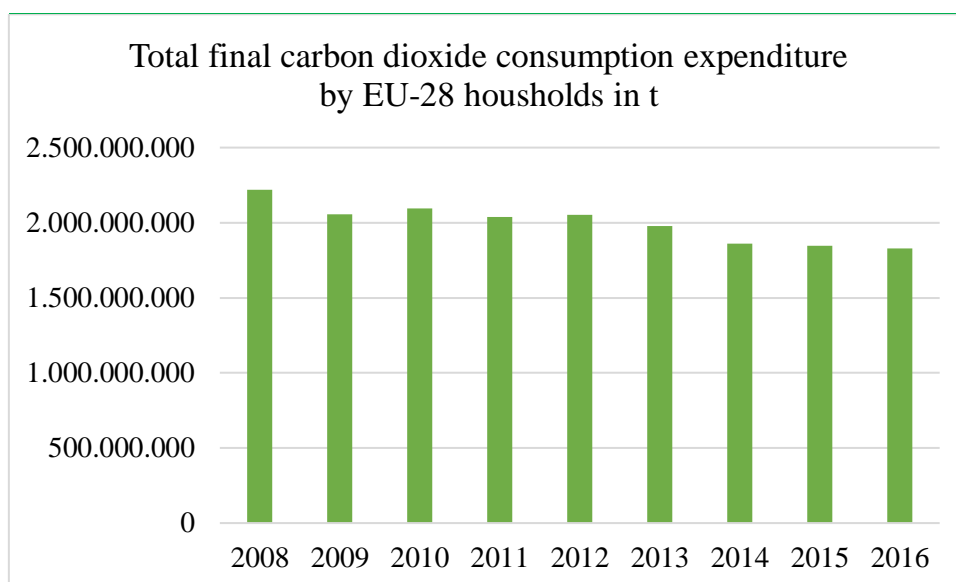


Table 5. Total final carbon dioxide consumption expenditure by EU-28 households in tonnes. Data: Eurostat.

CO2 emissions are the main cause for the greenhouse effect and one of the core elements that has to be reduced in order to stop the continuing of global warming (Worldwatch Institute, 2017). The trend of the declining consumption of CO2 consumption by households in the EU is to be evaluated generally positively, but not very drastically. We can observe a decline of 11% over 7 years.

From the eleven leading companies in CSR, the following nine have reported directly on the reduction of CO2 emissions in 2017:

#### 1. LEGO Group

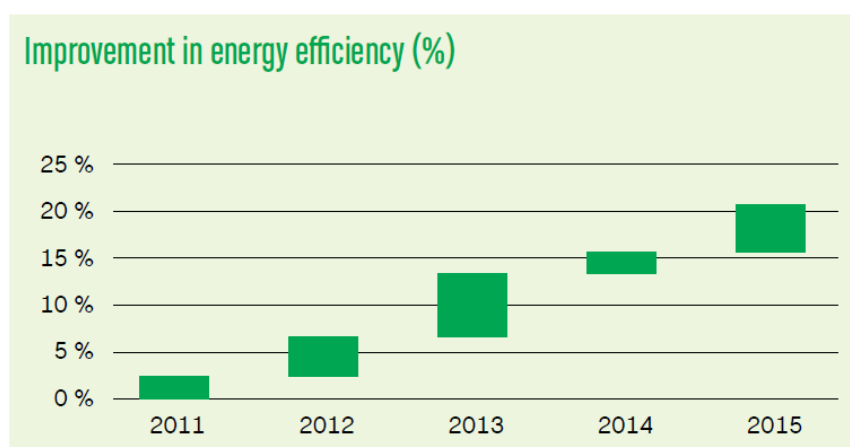


Figure 4. Lego Group Emissions Publication 2015, p1.

## 2. Microsoft

### Innovating on carbon

We've been carbon neutral since 2012, and we're still innovating in this space. In 2017, we bought the first-ever carbon credits generated by US rice farmers—opening a new door in carbon markets for agriculture.

Figure 5. Microsoft 2017 CSR Report, p. 37.

### Sustainability in product packaging

In FY17 we reduced the weight of product packaging materials by 27 percent and decreased packaging related greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent.

Figure 6. Microsoft 2017 CSR Report, p.38.

## 3. Google

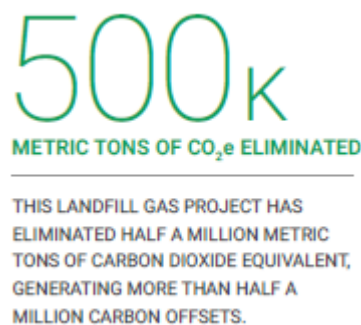


Figure 7. Google CSR Report 2017 on emissions, p. 10.

## 4. The Walt Disney Company

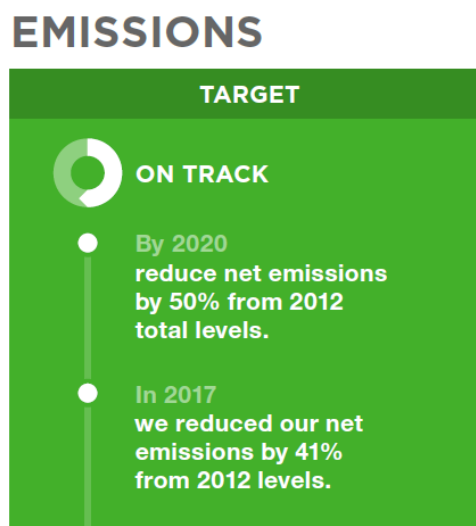


Figure 8. The Walt Disney Company CSR Report 2017 on emissions, p. 6.

5. Robert Bosch



Figure 9. Robert Bosch CSR Report 2017 on emissions, p.4.

\*: improvement relative to value added.

6. Cisco Systems

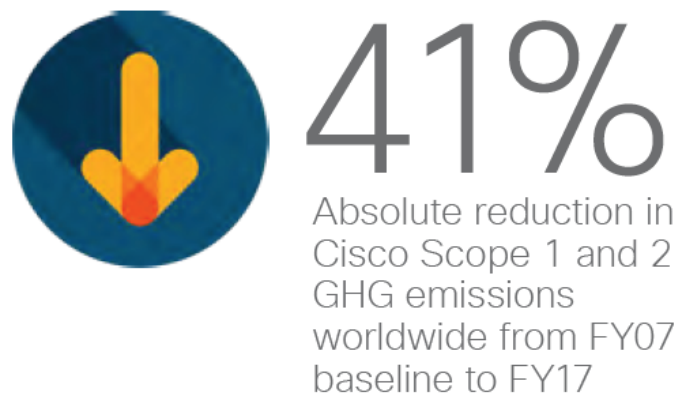


Figure 10. Cisco System CSR Report 2017 on emissions, p. 9.

## 7. Rolls-Royce Aerospace



Figure 11. Rolls-Royce Aerospace CSR Report 2017 on emissions, p. 45

- 1: External assurance over the STEM, energy, GHG, and TRI rate data provided by Bureau Veritas. See page 195 for their sustainability assurance statement.  
2: Statutory greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions data details on page 200.

## 8. Colgate-Palmolive

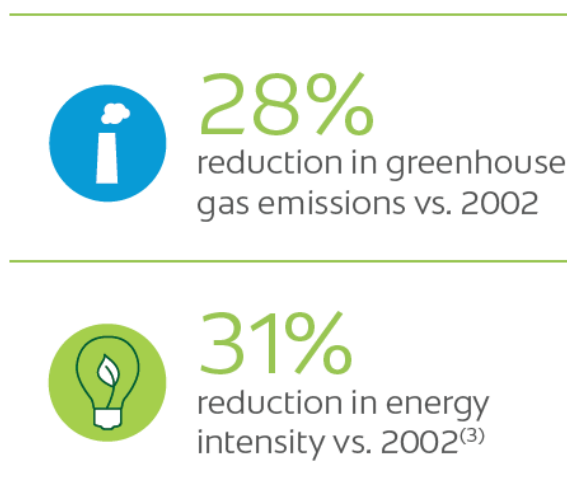


Figure 12. Colgate-Palmolive CSR report on emissions, p. 4.

- (3): Subject to final verification by third-party auditor.

## 9. Barilla

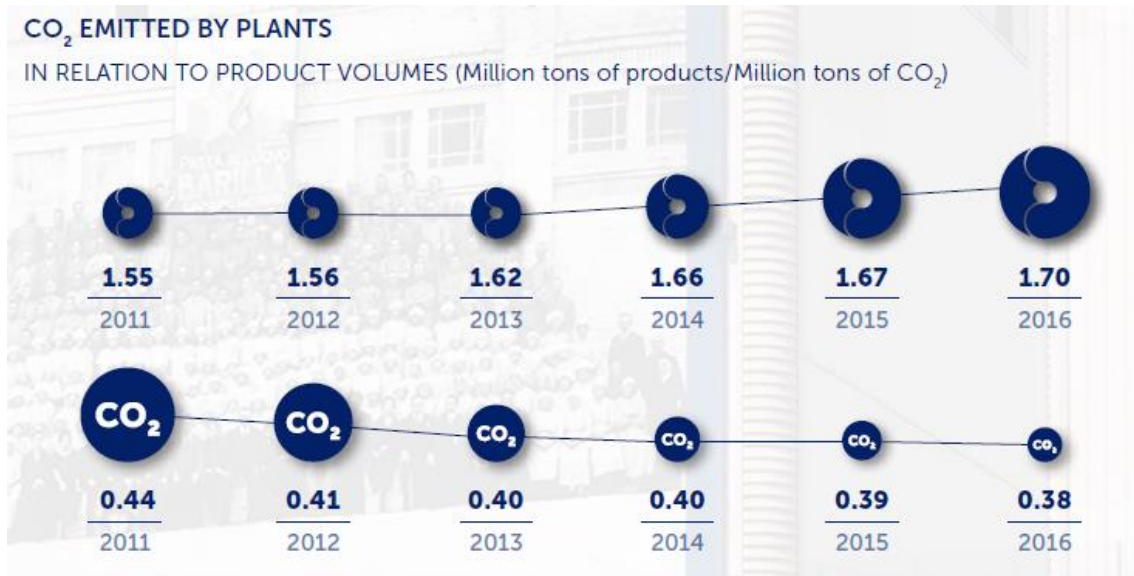


Figure 13. Barilla CSR report 2017 on emissions, p. 47.

As we can observe in Figures 6, 9 and 13, Lego, Bosch and Barilla are not presenting total values. The values are relative to production, which has increased, and shown is the per product or value added ratio. Disney's (Figure 8) 50% reduction of 'net emissions' seems to follow a similar calculation. In terms of efficiency, this is positive, but for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emission to slow down global warming it is not a contribution. The growth in productions means an increase in emissions, fitting with Latouche's argumentation (see section 2.1.2.1.). On the other hand, economies of scale could be the reason for the relative decrease of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per product. Nevertheless an increase in energy efficiency is a step in the right direction.

Cisco Systems (Figure 10), Rolls-Royce Aerospace (Figure 11), Colgate-Palmolive (Figure 12) present a total reduction of emissions, notably Palmolive by 28% and Cisco even by 41 %, both almost twice or three times more than the EU consumer. That is a significant contribution.

Google's (Figure 7) CSR efforts of eliminating 500.000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> truly goes beyond their operational activity and are a true example of a CSR contribution against climate change. Actions like this are vital for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and global warming.

### 4.3.2. Recycling and waste

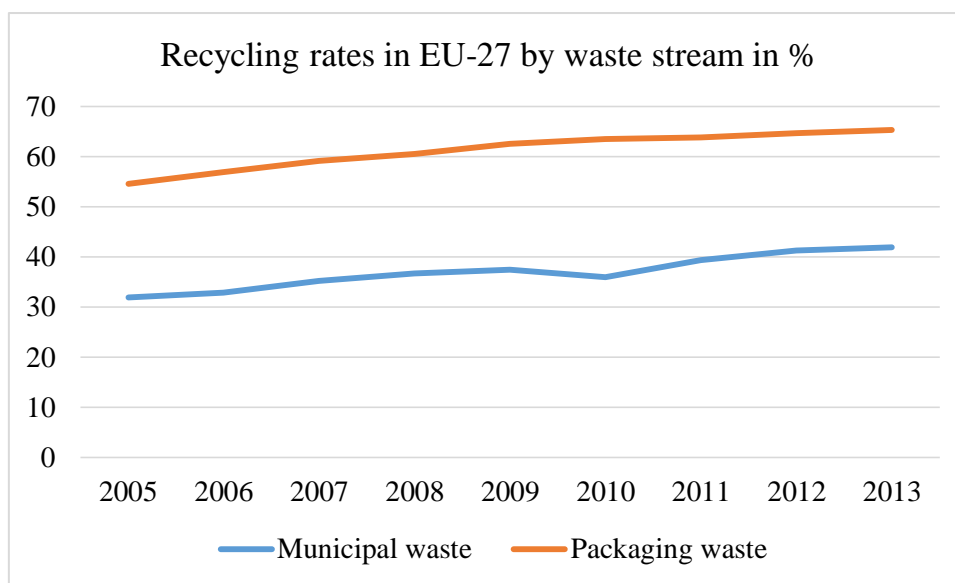


Table 6. Recycling rates in EU-27 by waste stream in %. Data: Eurostat.

*Packaging waste: The indicator is defined as the share of recycled packaging waste in all generated packaging waste.*

*Municipal waste: The indicator measures the tonnage recycled from municipal waste divided by the total municipal waste arising.*

The recycling trend for European Union is positive, especially for packaging waste. In 2013, about two thirds of the total packaging waste could be recycled. Yet one thing should be considered: recycle packaging is one of the easiest day-today-measures to contribute to a more circular economy and possibly reduce pollution. A lot of packaging is plastic, which can be recycled but is not compostable in nature, and the amount of plastic waste in the oceans which is harming wildlife is alarming. Recycling of packaging should be close to 100% and here the disconnection between mind-set of consumers and their actual behaviour is alarming. Due to consumption patterns, waste is part of our daily lives, and there is little excuse not to recycle packaging. For municipal waste, the numbers are rather poor, because not even half of it could be recycled. The statistic does not tell us if this is a structural problem on the municipal level, but within the EU this explanation is less likely.

The European Commission (2010, online) made the following statement:

In Europe, we currently use 16 tonnes of material per person per year, of which 6 tonnes become waste. Although the management of that waste continues to improve in the EU, the European economy currently still loses a significant amount of potential 'secondary raw materials' such as metals, wood, glass, paper, plastics present waste streams. In 2010, total waste production in the EU amounted to 2,5 billion tons. From this total only a limited (albeit increasing) share (36%) was recycled, with the rest was landfilled or burned, of which some 600 million tons could be recycled or reused.

Of those 600 million tons of waste probably not all, but a large share could have been reused if consumers only had cared to recycle.

Regarding the corporations, only six of the eleven CSR reports by the 2017 leading brands presented accurate information on recycling or successful waste reduction.

#### 1. Lego Group



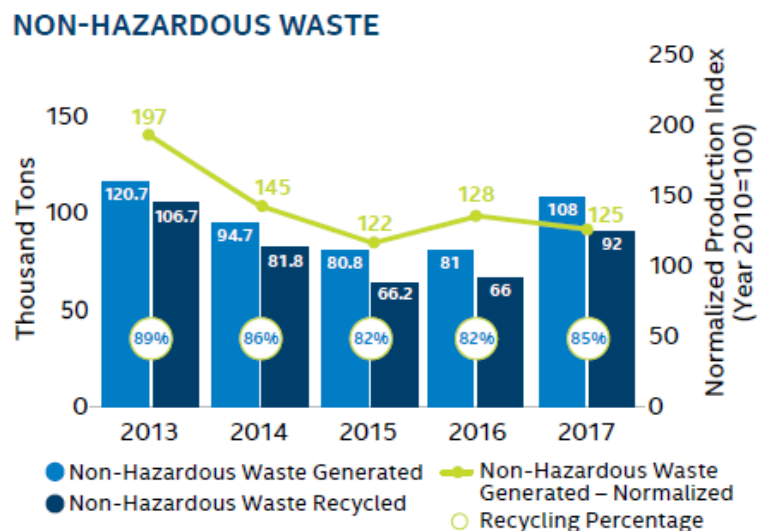
Figure 14. Lego CSR report 2017 on waste, p. 27.

## 2. The Walt Disney Company



Figure 15. The Walt Disney CSR report 2017 on waste, p. 6.

## 3. Intel



In 2017, our non-hazardous waste generated increased from 2016 levels primarily due to construction projects. However, compared to 2013, we generated 10% less non-hazardous and our normalized non-hazardous waste generated also decreased by 37%.

Figure 16. Intel CSR report 2017 on waste, p. 33.



4. Robert Bosch



**4.1%**  
less waste compared  
with 2015\*

A graphic with a light gray background featuring a faint image of a hammer and a wrench. The text is in a bold, green, sans-serif font.

Figure 17. Robert Bosch CSR report 2017 on waste, p. 4.

5. Cisco Systems

### Product End of Life

Our trade-in and recycling programs are designed to bring back the products that Cisco or our acquired companies have sold to channel partners and end-user customers. Of products sent to our e-scrap recyclers, nearly 100 percent are recycled, and all commodity fractions go to downstream recyclers to be made into new products. During FY17, we also refurbished, resold, reused, or recycled over 11,398 metric tonne of products returned to us ([Table 27](#)).

Figure 18. Cisco Systems CSR report 2017 on waste, p. 93.

6. Colgate-Palmolive

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Upcycled over  
**7 million**  
pieces of oral care packaging  
with Terracycle



---

Figure 19. Colgate-Palmolive CSR report 2017 on waste, p. 4.

Here Lego's (Figure 14) recycling efforts clearly outshine all the others with an astonishing 94%. This should be a way to follow and for consumers to start acting, especially because the everyday items are easier to dispose than production related ones. Disney (Figure 15) has successfully reduced their waste from landfill, although the diversion rate does not give information about the actual amount being recycled, and Bosch (Figure 17) reduced their total waste by 4,1%. Cisco (Figure 18) recycles almost 100% of electronic waste brought back to them, so this is a chance for consumers to recycle their old electronic devices through them. Intel's waste has increased (Figure 15), due to 'construction projects', however their recycling share was maintained.

Most notably, Colgate-Palmolive (Figure 19) teamed up with Terracycle to recycle packaging, which goes beyond efficiency optimisation and is a notable CSR project. The measurable outcome is happening at the everyday-micro level, helping the consumer directly making small but significant changes towards being more sustainable. This is strongly suggested by Fowler and Close (2012; see section 2.1.2).

### 4.3.3. Use of resources: water

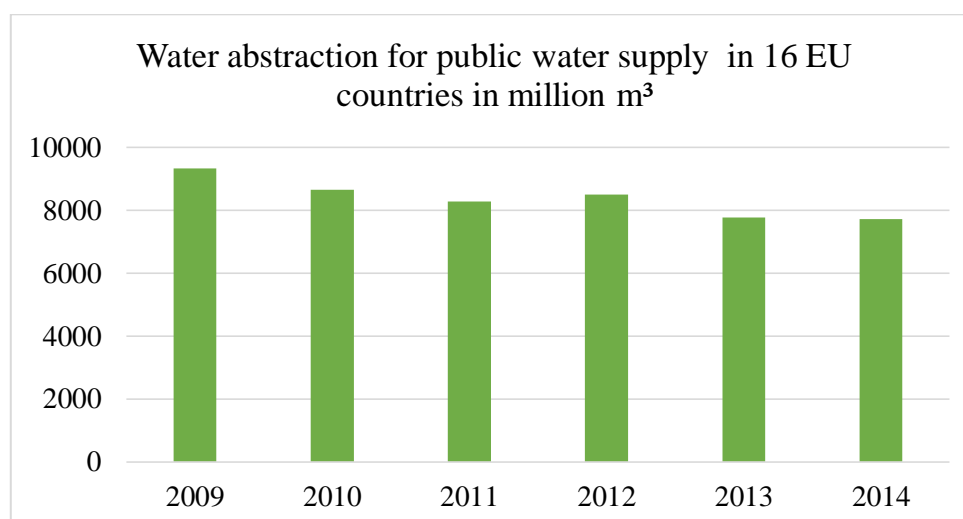


Table 7. Water abstraction for public water supply in 15 EU countries. Data: Eurostat.

The water consumption of households in the EU is not completely recorded, which might be due to member state differences and partial privatisation. The trend made up of 16 EU countries shows the water abstraction for the public, excluding industry. The trend is generally decreasing, falling 17 % from 2009 to 2014, but not consistent.

Seven of the eleven analysed 2017 CSR reports provide information on the resource water.

#### 1. Google

##### WATER

**40% REDUCTION  
IN POTABLE WATER USE**

From 2013 to 2016, we reduced potable liters of water used per Googler by 40% at our Bay Area headquarters.

Figure 20. Google CSR report 2017 on water, p. 15.

## 2. The Walt Disney Company

### WATER

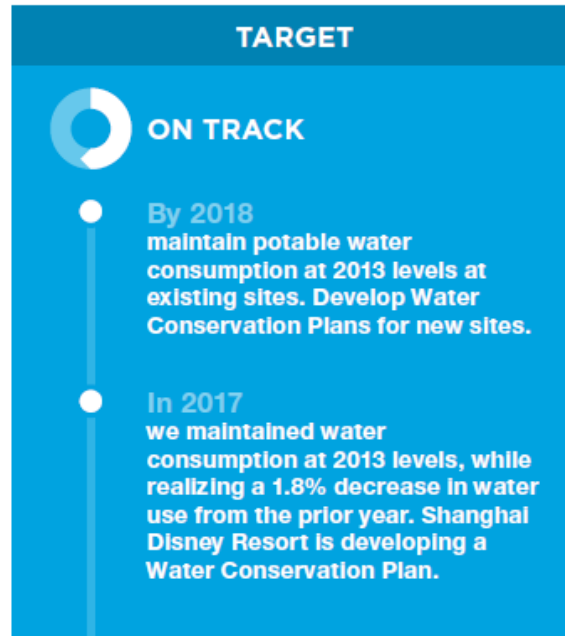


Figure 21. The Walt Disney Company CSR report 2017 on water 1, p 17.



Figure 22. The Walt Disney Company CSR report 2017 on water 2, p. 17.

3. Intel



Figure 23. Intel CSR report 2017 on water, p 24.

4. Robert Bosch

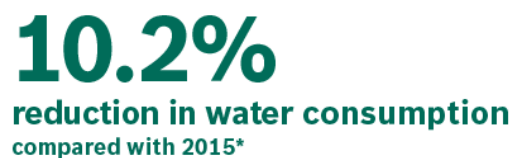


Figure 24. Robert Bosch CSR report 2017 on water, p. 4.

\*Improved relative to value added.

5. Colgate-Palmolive

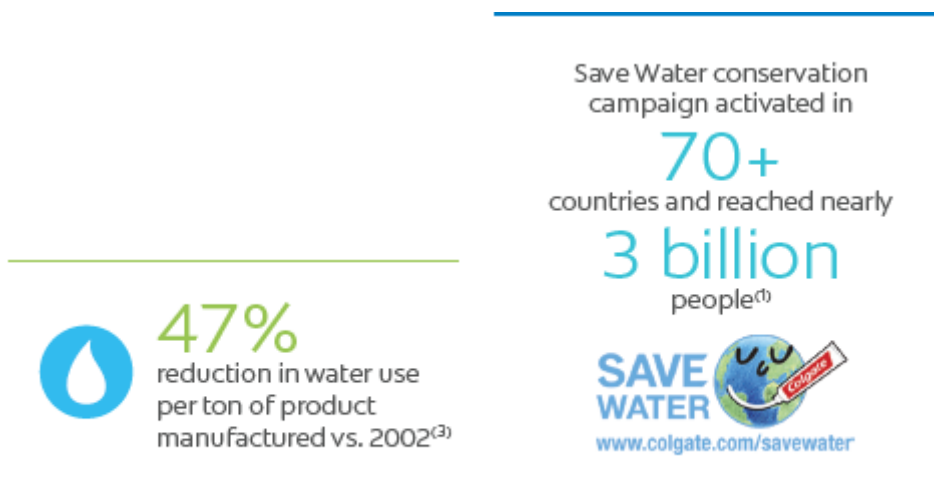


Figure 25. Colgate-Palmolive CSR report 2017 on water 1, p. 4. (left)

Figure 26. Colgate-Palmolive CSR report 2017 on water 2, p. 4. (right)

## 6. Barilla

### WATER CONSUMPTION REDUCTION

PER TON OF FINISHED PRODUCT COMPARED TO 2010

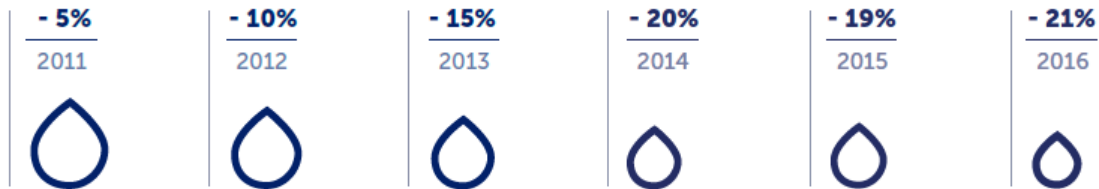


Figure 27. Barilla CSR report 2017 on water, p. 46.

Although the EU data on consumer's water consumption might not bring as many insights as hoped, Google (Figure 20) shows that their personal use of portable water has been cut by 40% in only 3 years, which almost twice as much as the reduction of water extraction for the EU public has been in 6 years. Those changes on a corporate, so-to-say office level, are exemplary for consumers to follow.

Disney's (Figure 21) target surprisingly is not to reduce portable water consumption, which shows how difficult it seems to be, but to simply maintain it for their existing sites. Nevertheless, in Disney's case this water consumption is also greatly caused by the visitors, who have to collaborate. In 2017 this seems to have worked, they were able to reduce portable water use in their theme parks and resorts by 129 million gallons compared to 2016 (Figure 22). They also work on sustainable water plans for their new sites.

Here, growth will inevitably worsen the company's overall use of natural resources, but the impact of the consumers contributing to water usage in Theme Parks and Resorts is something every visitor can and should change on the individual level.

Robert Bosch (Figure 24), Colgate-Palmolive (Figure 25) and Barilla (Figure 27) highlight their reduction of water consumption in production, but again only relative to production, which probably means the total amount of water consumptions has risen with increased production.

Intel (Figure 23) on the other hand is having a hugely positive impact on water consumption in their communities. They treat and return 80% of the water and have the goal to restore 100% by 2025. This can inspire communities to value the local water supplies and take action to reduce their consumption as well.

Colgate-Palmolive (Figure 26) had yet another CSR project helping raising awareness for water preservation, and hereby offering help their consumers on the micro level. Given that Colgate is operating in the oral care sector, this project on water consumption is strategically very well chosen according to Porter and Kramer's criteria (2006; section 2.1.3.)

#### 4.3.4. Use of renewable energy

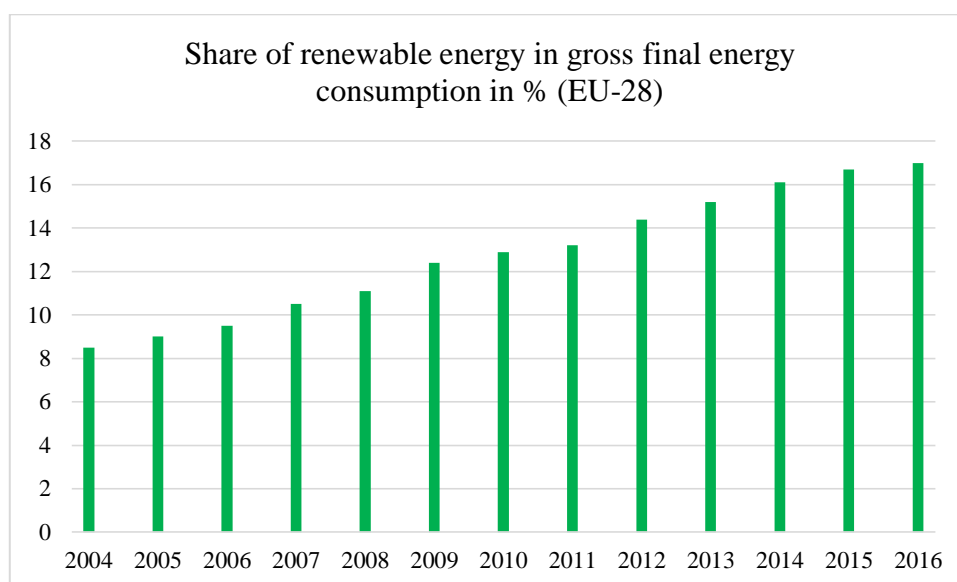


Table 8. Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption in % (EU-28). Own elaboration. Data: Eurostat.

The share of renewable energy consumption the EU has doubled since 2004, which is relevant in order to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and slow down global warming. Renewable energies do produce carbon emissions and are therefore not contributing to the greenhouse effect. Not all energy consumption can easily be switched to renewable energies, especially transportation based on fossil fuels. Nevertheless, the consumers in the EU have to choice of switching to a sustainable energy provider. The total share of renewable energy in the final consumption is still under 20 % and consumers should take measures to drastically increase that share.

Only five corporations out of the eleven CSR leader 2017 have explicitly provided data on their share of renewable energy.



## 1. LEGO Group

22 Responsibility Report

### Case Celebrating our 100% renewable energy milestone



In 2017, we achieved our ambition to balance 100% of the energy we used to make LEGO® bricks with energy from renewable sources, three years ahead of schedule.

Figure 28. Lego Group CSR report 2017 on renewable energy, p. 22.

## 2. Robert Bosch



Bosch also relies on renewable sources of energy at its locations, such as the hydropower plant it operates in Blaichach, Germany.

Figure 29. Robert Bosch CSR report 2017 on renewable energy, p. 9.

## 3. Cisco Systems

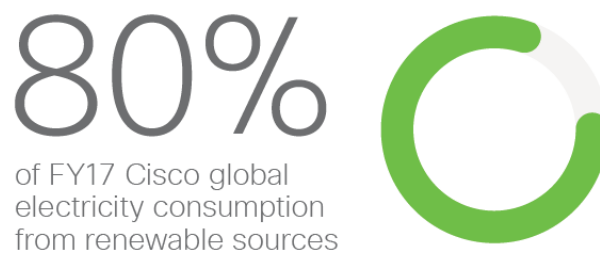


Figure 30. Cisco Systems CSR report 2017 on renewable energy, p. 9.

#### 4. Rolls-Royce Aerospace



Figure 31. Rolls-Royce Aerospace CSR report 2017 on renewable energy, p. 45.

#### 5. Barilla

ABOUT 40% OF THE  
ELECTRIC POWER  
USED BY BARILLA  
COMES FROM  
RENEWABLE SOURCES

Figure 32. Barilla CSR report 2017 on renewable energy, p. 48.

Barilla (Figure 32) has 40% of their electric power from renewable energy, which already is twice as much as the consumers in the EU. Cisco Systems (Figure 30) even has an astonishing 80% share of their electricity coming from renewable energy. Lego (Figure 28) is the absolute pioneer on the renewable energy front, making their bricks 100% with renewables. Nevertheless, this refers to production, while Barilla and Cisco are informing us about their electricity, so Lego seemingly still uses some energy from fossil fuels in company operations other than production.

Rolls-Royce Aerospace (Figure 31) and Robert Bosch (Figure 29) provide examples of more sustainable facilities which incorporate renewable energy production, like water and solar. Those are pilot projects but show the environmental concern especially at the community level, which in terms of CSR could especially inspire local consumers to switch their electricity provider.

## 5. Results

To evaluate the results of the research, the hypothesis will be consulted and evaluated according to the findings of the exploratory analysis.

Because of the exploratory nature of the research, the findings are descriptive and should uncover possible trends which can be subject for further research. Explorative research is conducted for a problem that has not been studied more clearly and was hence a valid methodology for exploring the not normalised reporting form of CSR reports.

It directly demonstrates, as a first finding, the lack of coherent and accurate data provided by companies in CSR reports, which is a severe weakness. CSR as a discipline should immediately address this problem, because the efforts of ethical and environmental contributions could potentially be doubted by the consumer. Accountability and credibility should be the advantage over traditional green advertising and the reporting cannot be neglected in CSR strategy. Perhaps the multidisciplinary character poses a problem here, when other areas than Communication or Marketing monitor the data relevant to CSR reportings. CSR is not only communication and should be an integrated part of the corporate strategy, so the management department should identify all involved departments. One suggestion following this research is forming interdisciplinary workgroups under the coordination of the Communication division. The Marketing department should be responsible for CSR reporting, controlling the transparency and cohesiveness of the data provided for the interest groups and general public.

Regarding the exploratory analysis of CSR reports by the leading CSR brands in 2017, two comments on the brands have to be made: Microsoft, although being second ranked, mostly communicated intentions and future goals, very specific and numeric, but failed to inform about the current state and progress, at least regarding the selected variables.

BMW only focused on sustainability in terms of making their core product more sustainable, which is desirable for the consumers, but also demanded by the government. Therefore this does not go beyond their central operations to contribute to society, at least regarding the environmental criteria established in this research. There have also been traces of crisis communications in their report, regarding the diesel

corruption that has shaken the industry. Whether or not that should be included in a CSR manual could be open to debate.

Moving on to the hypothesis, the following conclusions are made:

**H1: Brands employing CSR have surpassed the consumer in their efforts to be sustainable.**

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, the hypothesis cannot be confirmed with absolute certainty, but the study strongly suggests that brands, in the fields of recycling and renewable energy, have surpassed the consumer in their efforts to be sustainable.

Therefore, upon data availability, the analysis of those two variables should be subjects for future research.

**H2: The mind-set of the consumer varies drastically from their actual behaviour.**

This hypothesis can neither be confirmed nor be refuted. The environmental movement emerged in society and has been picked up by political institutions, like the EU, and brands in the form of green advertising and CSR. The data that has been explored does not suggest a huge effort of consumers to change their environmental impact in their everyday life.

**H3: CSR is a powerful tool for a more sustainable economy.**

The last hypothesis can be answered with certainty. Even if brands measure their energy emissions or savings per product instead of a total, it is still an important contribution for a more sustainable economy. If brands take Fowler's and Close's (2012) advice to design CSR actions to help consumers on the micro level, while being an example in their own environmental behaviour, CSR can be a powerful tool to contribute to a more sustainable system. Then it can be done together with the consumers and by promoting a more environmentally conscious consumption behaviour.

## 6. Conclusion

In the discussion of the literature it has been shown that consumers have the power to start movements and transform structures. The change demanded by society has resulted in a degrowth thinking and alternative economic systems beyond the means of profits have evolved. Two models, the 'Circular economy' and the 'Economy of the common good', have been presented in detailed and both are recognised as valid alternative by the European Union. There is no doubt that the consumer as citizen has the power to advocate for environmental concerns to be heard, by politics but also by corporations.

Green advertising was picked up by brands who heard the demand of the consumers for a more sustainable economy. Like consumers, brands also have transformational power to start movements, due to their resources and skills to shape public opinion. Nevertheless, the most involved consumers in environmental issues are the most sceptical of brands and advertising, and greenwashing is a huge obstacle for both parties to work hand in hand. It is laid out that green advertising has to go beyond green claims, and with transforming it to be part of Corporate Social Responsibility, and both forming part of the Communication division, the gap could be bridged.

It could be argued that corporations might only jump on the bandwagon of CSR because of brand reputation and economic savings on energy and resources, but it should not matter where the green motivation comes from. Highly involved consumers with the environment might be 'structural environmentalists' and brands have a technocratic approach about environmental concerns. What matters is that action of both parties is taken, and finally combined, because like the entering quote states: "the solution of the environmental crises is connected to an immediate modification of behaviour in the whole of the population" (Gómez, Noya, Paniagua, 1999, p. 17). But unfortunately almost two decades later, we are still steering in the same direction.

It could be said that what consumers criticise about greenwashing of brands is in the end exactly what many of them do: to promote the ideas of 'greenness' but in fact do not reflect that in their actions. This inconsistency in their behaviour cannot be explained like the paradox of advertisement, which is directly linked to economic profit and growth. Brands are now with CSR willingly held responsible for their social and environmental impacts while consumers do not seem to assume the responsibility their

transformational power could have on the environmental crises. It has been shown that brands seem to be ahead of consumers regarding recycling and the use of renewable energies, which should be subject to further research.

It is also suggested to further research on how to better incorporate CSR within the multiple operating areas of the company, so it can be managed more efficiently and responsibilities within the company are clear. When CSR becomes an integrated part of the brand's identity, it can be authentically communicated as such and consumer scepticism can be overcome.

This research has shown that reporting of CSR has still to be standardised and made more transparent and coherent in order to not endanger the environmental efforts that are currently made, as well as the potential of shaping of public opinion. It must be avoided to lose credibility and to being connected with greenwashing again.



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